

quick facts

About...Shingles

What are shingles?

Shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. Only people who have had chickenpox can develop shingles. After having chickenpox, the virus lies in a dormant state in certain nerve cells of the body and then reactivates, causing shingles (sometimes called herpes zoster). Reactivation of the virus can occur more than once.

What are the symptoms of shingles?

The first symptom of shingles is a burning pain or tingling and extreme sensitivity, usually in one area of the skin. This may be present for 1-3 days before a red rash appears. Fever and headache may occur. The rash soon turns into groups of blisters that look similar to chickenpox. The blisters generally last for two to three weeks.

How is shingles spread?

People with shingles can transmit the virus if the blisters are broken. If people who have never had chickenpox come into contact with the fluid from shingles blisters, they can develop chickenpox. Shingles is much less contagious than chickenpox. People who have already had chickenpox are not at risk for infection from contact with someone who has shingles.

Who is at risk for shingles?

Anyone who has had chickenpox is at risk for shingles. Shingles is more common in people age 50 years and older and in people who have weakened immune systems.

How is shingles treated?

In most cases, the condition clears up on its own in a few weeks and seldom recurs. Treatment of the symptoms with pain relievers and cool compresses can be helpful. Your health care provider may prescribe an anti-viral drug to lessen the severity and duration of symptoms.

Can shingles be prevented?

A shingles vaccine is now available for persons age 60 and older. The shingles vaccine results in fewer recurrences of shingles and can make recurrences less severe and painful. People who have already had shingles can still be vaccinated to prevent future infections.

Your health care provider can help to determine if you should receive the shingles vaccine.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/shingles/in-short-adult.htm>.

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